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Nearly 1 in 5 Stanislaus County educators get layoff warnings

By J.N. Sbranti
jnsbranti@modbee.com

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At least 964 Stanislaus County educators have been notified they may lose their jobs in July. That's more than 17 percent of the teachers, counselors, librarians and administrators in the county's public schools.

Statewide, the layoff total tops 23,255, which is about 13 percent of California's more than 300,000 educators.

Monday was the deadline for warning educators they may lose their jobs when this school year ends.

Many of those warned have "bumping rights," so they may be able to work in other positions within their districts. Administrators, for example, might be able to move back into classrooms, or counselors could replace teachers with less seniority.

All those bumping scenarios increased the number of layoff warnings delivered throughout Modesto City Schools. Initially, about 300 teachers, librarians and counselors were told to expect them, but 517 were handed out by Monday. The district also warned 67 managers they could be laid off.

Bad day at Kirschen

The notices particularly devastated the staff at Kirschen Elementary in Modesto, where about half the teachers were told their jobs are in jeopardy. Educators with as many as 10 years' seniority in the district got notices.

"I absolutely love doing what I do," said Kirschen first-grade teacher Tonja Jackson, 37, who received a layoff warning.

She began teaching in Modesto City Schools three years ago, and she earns about \$60,000 per year because she opted out of medical benefits. "I'm here at 6:30 in the morning, leave at 3:30 and bring work home with me."

Jackson and her husband bought a house two years ago, but she thinks she may have to move out of California to find another teaching job.

Melissa Morgan, another Kirschen first-grade teacher, said she was considering buying a home before she got her warning. The 26-year-old teacher earns \$54,000 per year, plus benefits. Now she fears she may end up on unemployment.

"We don't do it for the money," said Morgan, whose mother was a teacher. "We do it because we love these kids."

Some teachers wonder whether the administrators making the budget cuts are focused on educating children.

Modesto City Schools must slash at least \$25 million from its budget for the next school year because of declining enrollment and shrinking tax dollars. The district's school board members have said that for every 1 percent in salaries the schools trim, the district will save \$2 million.

"We are all willing to take a pay cut if that would save jobs," Morgan said.

Trustees have proposed teachers take 16 percent pay cuts to help balance the budget. Contract negotiations between teachers and the district began last week.

"Whatever salary decrease we have to take, the people in the brick building should take, too," Jackson insisted.

The "brick building" is filled by administrators, including Superintendent Arturo Flores, who earns \$217,344 per year plus perks, including a \$7,800 annual car allowance.



(BARTAH YOU/bahyou@modbee.com) Half of the teachers at Harriette Kirschen Elementary School received termination notices as budget cuts continue to plague the Modesto City School District, Monday afternoon. First grade teachers Melissa Morgan, Araceli Martinez and Tonja Jackson talk about how the layoffs will affect their lives. March 15, 2010 - Modesto Bee - Bart Ah You

"We've lost field trips and many things that make school fun and interesting for children," Jackson said. "So maybe administrators can lose their car allowances."

So far, Modesto City Schools have not proposed cutting administrators' pay, but typically the district negotiates its manager salaries after teacher union negotiations are settled.

Some bosses' pay cut

In Ceres, however, school administrators agreed to 8.5 percent pay cuts in January. The Ceres district is negotiating similar salary reductions with its unions, which is why it did not send layoff notices.

Patterson administrators cut administrative salaries 4 percent last year and 4 percent this year.

Districts throughout Stanislaus are making tough budget choices this spring because the state is proposing to cut \$2.4 billion in education funding.

Bee staff writer J.N. Sbranti can be reached at jnsbranti@modbee.com or 578-2196.



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Phone: (209) 578-2000.